Antoine De Saint-Exupery

The Little Prince

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To Léon Werth.

I hope children will forgive me if I dedicate this book to a grown-up. I have a serious excuse: this grown-up is the best friend I have in the world. I have another excuse: this grown-up understands everything, even books for children. I have a third excuse: this grown-up lives in France, where he is cold and hungry. He really needs consoling. If all these excuses aren't enough, I'm happy to dedicate this book to the child whom this grown-up used to be. All grown-ups started out as children. (But few of them remember it.) So I correct my dedication:

To Léon Werth
when he was a little boy

I

Once, when I was six years old, I saw a marvellous picture in a book on rainforests called Real-Life Stories. It depicted a boa constrictor swallowing a wild animal. Here is a replica of the picture.

In the book it said: "Boa constrictors swallow their prey whole, without chewing. Afterwards they cannot move, and sleep for six months digesting."

I thought a great deal about goings-on in the jungle and, in turn, with a crayon, managed to produce my first drawing. My drawing number 1.

It was like this:

I showed my masterpiece to the grown-ups and asked them if my drawing frightened them.

They answered: “What’s frightening about a hat?”

My drawing was not of a hat. It showed a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. I then drew the insides of the boa constrictor, so that the grown-ups could understand. They’re always looking for explanations. My drawing number 2 was like this:

The grown-ups' response, this time, was to advise me to lay aside my drawings of boa constrictors, whether from the inside or the outside, and devote myself instead to geography, history, arithmetic and grammar. That is why, at the age of six, I gave up what might have been a magnificent career as a painter. I had been disheartened by the failure of my Drawing Number One and my Drawing Number Two. Grown-ups never understand anything by themselves, and it is tiresome for children to be always and forever explaining things to them.

So then I chose another profession, and learned to pilot air-planes. I have flown a little over all parts of the world; and it is true that geography has been very useful to me. At a glance I can distinguish China from Arizona. If one gets lost in the night, such knowledge is valuable.

In the course of this life I have had a great many encounters with a great many people who have been concerned with matters of consequence. I have lived a great deal among grown-ups. I have seen them intimately, close at hand. And that hasn't much improved my opinion of them.

Whenever I met one of them who seemed to me at all clear-sighted, I tried the experiment of showing him my Drawing Number One, which I have always kept. I would try to find out, so, if this was a person of true understanding. But, whoever it was, he, or she, would always say: "That is a hat." Then I would never talk to that person about boa constrictors, or primeval forests, or stars. I would bring myself down to his level. I would talk to him about bridge, and golf, and politics, and neckties. And the grown-up would be greatly pleased to have met such a

"In one of the stars I shall be living. In one of them I shall be laughing. And so it will be as if all the stars were laughing, when you look at the sky at night... you, only you, will have stars that can laugh!"

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